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The Participation Forum^{*}

April 14, 1997

Topic: Citizen Monitoring and Evaluation: A View from Rural America

The twenty-second session of the Participation Forum drew participants out of their normal work arenas overseas and right back into the United States with presentations on the Empowerment Zone experience in Jackson County, Kentucky. Vicky Creed, Associate Director of the National Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) Learning Initiative, reviewed the participatory process used to evaluate the EZ/EC program. With her were two members of the Learning Team from Jackson County, one of three counties that make up the Kentucky Highlands Empowerment Zone: Cathy Howell and Brian Thomas—citizen volunteers monitoring and evaluating how the empowerment zone is working in their county. Although the Kentucky Highlands Empowerment Zone was itself initiated and run by local boards representing the intended “customers,” the Learning Initiative added a critical ingredient needed for effective participation: knowledge. By informing interested citizens about the resources and decision-making processes of the EZ and training them in evaluation techniques, it enabled them to make the EZ program more transparent and accountable to its customers. The challenge faced by the Jackson County Learning Team was how to structure the monitoring process so as to avoid both chaos and cooptation. Kelly Kammerer, AA for Policy and Program Coordination, led off the session.—Diane La Voy, Senior Policy Advisor for Participatory Development

Sharing Development Experiences

Kelly Kammerer

The materials on the empowerment-zone concept made me reflect back on my first job, with the Peace Corps in rural community development in Colombia. With people we worked with, we used the example of the New England town-meeting concept of democracy as a model: people would get together in their villages once a year and decide what issues

they wanted to confront. Other than that, we didn't look much to the United States for examples of community development or participation.

Twenty-five years later, when I was mission director in Nepal, for our integrated rural development work we tended to look mostly at literature that had been generated by USAID in

^{*}The Participation Forum is a series of monthly noontime meetings for USAID personnel to explore how to put into practice the Administrator's mandate to “build opportunities for participation into the development processes in which we are involved” (“Statement of Principles on Participatory Development,” November 16, 1993). Guest speakers from in and outside of USAID describe their experiences and enter into a general discussion of the theme of the session. A summary of the meeting is disseminated within USAID by E-mail, and readers are encouraged to engage in an E-mail dialogue. E-mail should be directed to Diane La Voy, using either the USAID directory or INTERNET, as DLAVOY@USAID.GOV. Printed copies of the Forum summaries will be distributed to participants and attendees from outside of USAID and others interested in participatory development. The Office of Health and Nutrition's Environmental Health Project (EHP) arranges logistics, maintains the mailing list, and prepares the Forum summaries.

our international experience over the years. Again, we did not look to U.S. models.

This is a good opportunity to share views in a way that we've been trying to foster

in the Agency over the last four years: exchanging lessons that we've learned overseas with people working for similar goals in the United States.

Background on the EZ/EC Program

Vicky Creed

The Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) Program was started in 1993. At that time, \$2.5 billion was set aside for tax incentives and \$1 billion in Title 20 block grants to focus on the poorest communities in the United States. One hundred and four urban and rural communities were selected for the program through a competitive process. Communities had to meet certain criteria in terms of geography, population, poverty, demographics, and so on. Over 500 communities applied for this money.

Like most anti-poverty programs, the EZ/EC Program includes a focus on economic opportunity and development, but it also incorporates a principle of sustainable community development which sets it apart. All communities in the program have to go through a process of forming new partnerships and coming up with a strategic vision that is the vision of the whole community and not just of the development team or the people who typically ran things in the communities. The vision has to be developed before proposals and plans can be set forth.

The Learning Initiative Pilot Project

When it was time to evaluate the EZ/EC Program, it was decided that one way—not the only way, but one way—that an evaluation could be conducted would be to follow the participatory principles of the program. Such an evaluation would involve people in the local community, as diverse a group as we could make it. They would look at the vision, how the program had been established, and implementation. They would identify what they thought were the key objectives and would learn how to do monitoring and measuring in the local communities.

Last March, just a little over a year ago, community evaluation teams were set up in ten pilot communities selected from across the country based on the extent of formal organizing and how well people were already working together. The three Enterprise Zones—Rio Grande Valley (Texas), Mid-Delta (Mississippi), and Kentucky Highlands—were automatically included in the pilot program.

Development of the participatory evaluation model was also a participatory process supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Ford Foundation, with the University of Tennessee as primary coordinator and contractor. Regional universities particularly interested in participatory research and community development provided facilitators and technical assistance. The project that evolved was called the National Learning Initiative.

Out of Chaos Comes Growth

We just came out of a meeting in which Diane La Voy referred to us as experts, and I said, “We are not experts at all.” We are just out there fumbling around, trying to figure out how to do this. We certainly haven't learned how to manage chaos. We've got chaos everywhere. What we are trying to do is take a positive spin on it and say, well, out of chaos comes growth. How are we going to form these new partnerships in communities without a little chaos? Do we think we're going to go into communities that have historical differences, as most communities do, and that instantly those differences are going to go away? No, they're not.

The National Learning Initiative goes into an Empowerment Zone or Enterprise Community and sets up a learning team that's

supposed to have stakeholders on it from all around the table and from elements in the community that have never ever been at the table before. And guess what? There's lots of chaos. The initiative is one year old, and we are still very much in the learning phase.

Ten-Step Learning Process

The initiative used a ten-step learning process originated by the University of Tennessee with some folks from across the country that had experience with community development and popular education.

1. Form a Citizens' Learning Team
2. Revisit EZ/EC Goals (Session 1)
3. Choose Priorities for Monitoring and Measuring (Session 2)
4. Identify Indicators of Success (Session 3)
5. Determine Ways of Collecting Information (Session 4)
6. Refine Methods Through Field Tests (Sessions 3-5)
7. Collect Information (Sessions 5-7)
8. Analyze and Assess (Session 8)
9. Develop Strategies for Sharing Findings (Session 9)
10. Take Action (Session 10)

Some teams chose to go through the process literally, with one monthly meeting per work session. Other teams take a more flexible approach. We're gathering information right now on best practices and what's worked.

We asked the teams to focus on one single objective, on one single identifier of success, and to figure out measures and monitors. That was really hard, because they wanted to try to measure everything. Team members were mainly people who had never measured anything, not professional researchers. We kept saying, "Keep it simple. You cannot measure everything that is going on." We've been muzzling them. However, the Kentucky Highlands team still picked out three objectives even though we told them to pick only one.

The University of Tennessee advisors developed a manual for the teams. We were so proud. We thought it was the best thing since sliced bread. We sent it out into the

communities, but we've learned it's been sitting on a shelf. Now we're getting feedback to find out what we need to do to revise the manual so that people really use it. We want it to be coffee stained and dog-eared.

Also the University of Tennessee has conducted workshops to teach teams how to do their work. We've stayed in touch with teams by telephone. The regional researchers have attended and facilitated meetings. In all of the pilot communities, the Learning Teams have made specific contributions.

Two Members of the Learning Team

Today we have two members of one of our Learning Teams here with us. Cathy Howell is the Learning Team coordinator for Jackson County. A mother of four, a grandmother of ten, Cathy is a homemaker who has become a professional volunteer. We've used up every single bit of her time, about burned her out. Her husband probably hates us. Brian Thomas is a home-grown boy. He was raised in Kentucky and now teaches high school there, physics and chemistry. He is also a captain on the volunteer fire department. These folks will give you the story of the Jackson County Learning Team.

Jackson County is one of three counties in the Kentucky Highlands Empowerment Zone. Each of the counties has its own EZ board. In our pilot project, we are focused on only one of the three counties.

A Snapshot of Jackson County

Brian Thomas: Jackson County is in southeastern Kentucky in a region of rolling hills and pastures. The population of the entire county is just under 12,000 people living in small, tight-knit communities of less than a thousand each.

There's some positive and negative things about our county. On the negative side, 40 percent of the population are at or below the poverty level; about 60 percent do not have high school diplomas; 85 percent have jobs that pay minimum wage or slightly above. We do not have any homeless people, but the

structures that some people call home are mainly just shacks with some form of heat. We have few conveniences. If you need anything besides just the basic necessities of life, you'll have to drive to an adjoining county. There are some small stores in our county, but many of these are still little country stores that will make you feel as if you had stepped back 40 years in time. The roads are very poor.

But this underdevelopment lends a kind of beauty. The county lies in the Daniel Boone National Forest, so there's a tremendous amount of undeveloped forest land. There are many stories of people who've passed through Jackson County and have liked it so well that they've settled there. There's lots of outdoor recreation: hiking, fishing, hunting, spelunking, rock climbing, canoeing.

There certainly is crime, but crimes that we usually associate with large cities, such as armed robberies, murders, muggings, and rapes, are almost unheard of in our county. And there are many stories of good people in the county, of people whose car has broken down and they've been surprised that people have not just driven on by but have stopped to help them.

Involvement with the Learning Initiative

Cathy Howell: I am one of those people who was passing through Jackson County and decided, "This is where we're going to live," and that's what we did. It's one of the most beautiful places you ever saw in your life.

After we'd been there for about four years, I wanted to get involved with the community. One thing I had never done was to get my GED, and so I was a 50-year-old grandma trying to get a GED. One of my teachers said, "You know, I'm going to remember you, and someday I'm going to find you a job." Two years later, one of the researchers from the University of Kentucky came to the Empowerment Zone board and asked for names of people to be on the Learning Team. That lady remembered me and gave them my name. That's where it all started for me. As coordinator, I asked for more names from the board to put together the team. But about 80 percent

of the people whose names they gave us didn't want to participate. One of the EZ board members gave us Brian's name and so that's how it started with Brian.

When the team was finally put together, we ended up with teachers and housewives and Vista workers—people from all over the community, from every walk of life: people that have to draw welfare or everyday people who just go to work and want to know more about the Empowerment Zone. Brian was one of those people.

Brian Thomas: I thought that the Empowerment Zone could be a positive force in our community, and I was interested in getting involved with it. With my job teaching and being a new father, I stayed very busy. But I do try to do as much as I can in the community and try to center it on things that I think will have a positive effect. The Empowerment Zone embodies that.

I had made an attempt to get involved with one of the Empowerment Zone projects that I felt I could give some input to. I didn't push really hard to get involved, but I did talk to some people about it, and they didn't seem particularly interested in my becoming involved, for one reason or another. I was really happy to receive the call about the Learning Team. It was something that was very easy to get involved with. They came to me. I didn't even have to go to them.

Public Relations Activities

Cathy Howell: The Learning Team started with 12 members. We tried to get as many members as possible, because when you work with volunteers, it's hard to get them to stay unless they really are interested in what's happening. We started with 12. One person who was too busy dropped out. One lady who had her own agenda and thought she could fight her vendettas in our group dropped out after we quietly said, "No, that's not going to happen." Another lady on our team went all the way through to the writing. Her boss said to her, "I do not want your name on that report," and she quit the Learning Team. She said, "I would love to have my name on the report, but

if it comes to my livelihood, I can't do it." We ended up with nine people that went through the whole process.

Actually, what we became was a public relations group. We went out and talked to the community about the Empowerment Zone. We found that people knew we were an Empowerment Zone, and they knew they were elated on December 24th or whenever it was when they got the news that they were going to be an Empowerment Zone, but they really didn't know what it was all about. Citizens' participation and grassroots work is what the Empowerment Zone is supposed to be. People were supposed to be involved, but they didn't know how to go about it.

The Learning Team started giving out information as we learned it, and people started getting really involved. There were meetings of the Empowerment Zone board that people had never showed up for. We were trying to build a community center, and we didn't have any participation there. People started coming to the meetings and saying, "Yeah, we really need this community center." We had become a public relations-type team. People would call us up and ask when the EZ board meetings were to be held.

Brian Thomas: As some evidence that the Learning Team did become a public relations vehicle, I can say, for one thing, I learned a lot. I keep my ears and eyes open, read the paper, and try to know what's going on in my community, but I found out that I didn't know much about the EZ until I joined the Learning Team.

As I was conducting some interviews during our research, I found that many people did not know much about the Empowerment Zone, and these were people that should have. One person's answers to most of the questions consisted of, "I don't have anything to say about that," or "I don't know," or "I'm not familiar with that." Another person told me that he didn't think he would have anything constructive to say. He was very evasive, and I never interviewed him. These were people that should have known a lot. Maybe we've changed some of that.

As a schoolteacher, I wanted to stop my physics class sometime and say, "Let's talk about the Empowerment Zone, because I bet you guys don't know very much about it." Of course, teenagers are notorious for being uninformed on current events. But, still, in their community, you would think they would know about it, and most didn't. So I found myself speaking with lots of people about the Empowerment Zone.

The Impact of the Learning Team's Report

Cathy Howell: Our researcher from the University of Kentucky went to the EZ board and asked the board to sanction us, and they agreed for the Learning Team to take place there in the community. They said, "It's really good to be looked over by outsiders." Well, actually, we're not outsiders. We're what it was all supposed to be about, we hoped. And so they turned us over to the director of the Empowerment Zone and said, "You take care of them. Whatever they do is fine."

So what we did was to go to every meeting. We went to every meeting there ever was in that whole community—not only Empowerment Zone meetings, but city council meetings, development meetings, any kind of meeting in the community, because to understand the Empowerment Zone, you had to understand the community. One way to do that was to monitor community meetings. I personally attended 452 meetings.

The board didn't pay too much attention to us unless we had been to other Empowerment Zones, and then they wanted to know how they compared.

Then all of a sudden, our report came out, and there were a few people on the board who didn't care much for our report. But there were also a lot of people who said, "Yes, these are things that needed to be brought to the surface." The board had a meeting with us and responded to our concerns. We told them that people need to know what's happening in the Empowerment Zone. Board members need to give out more information in different ways so that people know what's happening. And they have agreed to that. They agreed to most of the

recommendations. And we were really glad about that.

But there were a few people who took offense at what we had done and what our report said. They may not let us continue as a Learning Team. But for the most part, we feel that we have accomplished what we set out to do—to increase citizen participation. Now the citizens are participating, and they know what's going on.

Personal Impacts

Cathy Howell: Brian and I probably would never have met in a thousand years, except for the Learning Team. I personally have met people all over our community, and formed really good relationships with them. And even some of the different groups in our community have come together, and that probably wouldn't have happened had it not been for the Learning Team.

Brian Thomas: The Learning Team has done some very positive things for me personally. Working in the school system, I see a lot of my colleagues working on their master's degrees and taking classes about research methods. It was gratifying for me to think that I was actually doing those things, not just learning about them in a classroom.

Also, although I've lived in our county for almost 27 years, it's a very complicated situation there politically. I now have a lot more insights into how the system works, although I've still only scratched the surface.

I had to ask myself if what I was doing would have any negative impacts on my family. "Is my wife's job safe? Is the job of other family members safe? If someone wants to get back at me, could they threaten me or my family with loss of our jobs?" I had to ask myself very carefully, "Does my name need to be on the front of that report?"

Figuring Out How to Make the Learning Team Work

Brian Thomas: We have learned several things as we have fumbled around and attempted to do this evaluation. First of all,

those who pick members of the Learning Team have to make sure that those they pick have pure agendas and are not trying to get back at someone or serve personal interests. I approached one person about being on the Learning Team, and he said, "Yes, I would like to get on that. I'm very disgusted with one of the decisions that was made in one of the projects. I'd love to get on your team." And I said, "You're still welcome, but you're going to have to realize that you can't use the Learning Team to get back at that project. We may center your research on other activities so that you're not tempted to do that."

The Learning Team must have sufficient membership, because most of the people are going to be volunteers, and they will have a limited amount of time. Also the membership must be diverse. To conduct interviews of the biggest cross-section possible, the team needs people of all socioeconomic statuses, both genders, a wide age range, and so on.

One of our issues that we're still struggling with is the openness of our meetings. Of course, we have to comply with state laws about openness of meetings, but it is difficult to say to a committee or a group, "We're going to look at what you're doing and give you some positive feedback on some things you can do differently, and a pat on the back for the things that you did well," and have them sitting in on your planning meetings. That's a little difficult, because they can push your agenda toward the things that they want you to look at and away from the things that they don't want you to look at.

As we start this process again we're going to make sure that we have a research plan down to begin with and don't just meet every couple of weeks and say, "Okay, now let's do this research." We want a dynamic plan to begin with that we can change as we go, but that sets our direction. Also, it's very important to make sure to meet regularly and share information as it is being collected because that affects the dynamic plan.

Technical support from universities has already been mentioned. That's very important, because, as nonprofessional researchers, we do

not have research skills, and we need assistance.

Vicky Creed: Cathy and Brian mentioned the importance of sharing information periodically during the assessment process. We have learned that same lesson at the coordinating office. As interviews are conducted and as lessons are learned, figure out with whom they need to get shared as soon as possible. Looking at it from the national level, the feedback loop was a real critical piece. We found that we needed to hold monthly or quarterly feedback sessions with different stakeholder groups. Otherwise they get real nervous. They're not sure what you're doing and think you're out to get them, when in fact that's not what's happening. We are trying to improve these communities, not to destroy their programs. It is a process for continuous improvement.

Learning Team Victories

Vicky Creed: The Learning Teams in all of our sites were primarily focused on process, because it's too early in the implementation of the Empowerment Zone program to be looking at outcomes. So they were looking closely at citizen participation and gave feedback that was as concrete as how the room got set up. Now, when the EZ board meets, the room is set up completely differently. It's now set up so that everybody can see each other and can talk to each other. Also, they've started having meetings at different times than they did before, so that more people can come, so that working people can come. The board has invited different people to serve on the

committee that's planning the community center. They've invited the school system to provide a member to the board in order to develop relationships with the local schools.

In other words, real positive progress has already come about as a result of the feedback that this Learning Team has given their local EZ board.

EZ Board-Learning Team Relationships

Vicky Creed: The Kentucky Learning Team is different from the other Learning Teams, as each of them is different from each other. There is no blueprint for this. Every site is different, but in every site the people who are actually delivering the services are at the table with the Learning Team. It really is a form of self-evaluation driven by what's going on in the local communities.

The changes in the relationship between this Learning Team and their EZ board is similar to other sites. In some cases, the board has gone through the distrust-mistrust conflict of deliberating whether or not to endorse the Learning Team for another year and are now on the other side. For example, McDow County has just voted to go forward. After going through a period of mistrust, trust was reestablished, and the board and the Learning Team agreed that they wouldn't agree on everything. It wasn't cooptation. It wasn't "group think," where you get more people around the table that are going to agree with you. It also didn't turn into a polarized situation where the Learning Team is seen as a group of outsiders and must fight just to get on the agenda.

Discussion Session

Economic Opportunities

Babette Prevot: One of your broad goals is economic opportunity. Has your team been able to determine whether the Enterprise Zone is attracting new businesses to your community so the kids don't have to leave?

Cathy Howell: We're working on it. We looked at three goals. The first was the recreation center. The second was a lake for water and for recreation. Between 70 and 80 percent of our community has good drinking water. The rest of them don't. So we need a lake to make sure that everybody has water. Also, to be able to bring new businesses to our community, we have to be able to offer them water and gas and good roads. From a recreation point of view, we could establish small businesses around that lake if we got it.

The third goal was to build a building to bring a new business to our community. This building has been finished. As of the first of April, a new business did move in. Now they're starting to build another building. In other words, two of our goals are working on job creation.

Brian Thomas: One of the good ideas that we got this morning at a meeting here at USAID was the concept of using a building as a place for several businesses to set up temporary offices where they can start up. That's an idea we can carry home.

Joan Harrigan-Farrelly (WorldWID Fellow): Are young folks leaving the county because agriculture is not perceived as a glamorous business career anymore? Is there a way to begin to steer young people into agriculture-related jobs—computerization of agricultural farming systems for example—so they can remain part of the community?

Cathy Howell: Our lead entity, which is Kentucky Highlands, has set up an alternative crop loan fund so that people who have been growing tobacco all these years can now start growing cabbage or pumpkins. If the alternative crop fails, they don't have to pay those loans back.

Brian Thomas: At our high school, we have a very active Future Farmers of America, which does very well in competitions nationwide. That would probably be the best vehicle for steering young people into agriculture.

Cathy Howell: Farming is not something that kids nowadays really want to get into. It's kind of a dying art.

Strengthening Grassroots Support

Diane La Voy: I'd like to hear your comments on this e-mail from Lawrence Dolan in Manila, Philippines: "In my experience in the U.S., efforts to encourage participation typically brought out the socioeconomic extremes of a community, the people near the bottom of the ladder—single mothers and so on—trying desperately to hang on, and the people at the top, who could leave but, for a variety of reasons, have decided to stay. The factors associated with participation overseas varies from country to country, but there seems to be a similar gap involving a lack of participation by people in the middle rungs relative to that particular community. I'd be curious to find out whether the people of Kentucky have tried to reach out to this silent majority, and, if so what approach they have taken and what level of success they have had with it." But let's get some other comments and questions.

Ginny Seitz (Director, WorldWID Fellows Program): I was intrigued with the similarities between the communities that I did research on in southwest Virginia and what happened in your community. Very often when a community receives a lot of attention and outside funding and successfully organizes itself, those with more power attempt to hijack the agenda and push the organization in one way or another. In such instances, it's important to have strong grassroots support. It sounds to me as if what you were doing in your monitoring and evaluation was strengthening grassroots support for the Empowerment Zone activities themselves. How do you see your role as maintaining that kind of full

participation within the Empowerment Zone organization?

Brian Thomas: As part of our evaluation, we have tried to verify that meetings are open in the sense of not only who can attend, but also who can participate. We've tried to make sure that the input from people in the community has been used. In one of our projects, we think that's already the case. And in another project, we think that that is now becoming the case. We hope we are having a lasting impact by making people realize that if their views aren't being taken into account, they can be if they will just speak loud enough.

Cathy Howell: The community center has been a very big project with us. The reasoning behind it was to reduce juvenile crime. We need some place for our youth and our families to go. We have nothing in our community. Our children stand on the street corners and gather in parking lots. So a community center is really needed. However, the person who is running that project group has her own agenda. She'd like to see a 300-seat theater. We've decided that that's not what we need, and we can't sustain that. It has been a real hard fight, and it's not over yet. We're still in there pumping. But it's been real hard to show them that this is not what we want and not what we need.

Since the Learning Team report has come out, people have started to come to the meetings of the community center project. When the community center committee first started meeting, there was a lot of participation, but then people got turned off because they weren't being heard. So the leader of the committee and I and just one other person sat through three or four meetings. Now, since our report has come out, 40 or 50 people attend these meetings. They're saying, "Okay, you are going to listen to us. This is what we want." We have tried to give the middle-class people that kind of courage and support.

I interviewed the man who runs our newspaper, and I asked him, "Why don't people get involved?" And he answered, "Because everything is so political. Everything in this community is political, and people tend to stay away from politics unless they are political

players themselves." And that's true. People say, "I'm not getting involved. The politics up there are horrendous." But now eventually they are coming around and people are getting involved in spite of the politics. Hopefully they will stay involved.

Brian Thomas: Once the community center is built years down the road, it would be really sad to do a survey and find out that it was not the community center people were hoping for. We want the survey to show that it was exactly what they were hoping for.

So far the Learning Team has said to the people, "Hey, you'd better be careful. There are a few politically powerful people that are aiming this community center in the direction that they want. You'd better get some input." I hope when our next report comes out, we can say, "It looks like the community center that we're aiming for at this point is what the people want." And if that's not the case, I'm going to say, "Hey, look, you'd better get in there and make your voice heard."

Gender Issues

Gretchen Bloom: How can women's community leadership be used on learning teams and their leadership skills further developed without setting up serious opposition from men? If both women and men are involved, does this make for better programming, better impact, and so forth?

Brian Thomas: When Cathy started putting her team together, the list of names that she obtained from the Empowerment Zone board had both men and women on it. However, only about 20 percent of the people she talked to agreed to be on the team, and they were all women. So she called one of the board members and said, "We need better proportions than this. We need representation from both genders." That shows that there was no idea in our community that women could not sit on the Learning Team.

Why the first group was all women, we don't know. We discussed that. It was not that they were housewives and had the time. That was certainly not the case. Most of them worked outside the home and were very busy.

Eventually, the Learning Team was about 60 percent women and 40 percent men. There are gender problems in the county, but they didn't influence our team very much.

Do you need both genders? Yes, you certainly do. And this goes back to a previous comment I made about the need for a wide range of people, if for no other reason, at least for conducting interviews. It's easier to interview a person that you can relate to.

Power Struggle

Jim Fremming: How powerful do you think you should be as a learning team?

Ayanna Toure: From some of the comments you made, I got the idea that some people saw the program as a social or a political liability.

Cathy Howell: It is true that some considered us a liability. The EZ board is made up mostly of the hierarchy of our community. Our judge magistrate, who kind of runs our community, and people who sit on other boards also sit on our Empowerment Zone board. They give their time very freely, to make sure that the Empowerment Zone works.

But they are people who have never been questioned. Nobody had ever said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you doing it like this?" The Learning Team came along and made them stop and think that there were people out there who might question what they were doing. They had had free rein to do whatever they wanted until we came in and we started questioning them. And when our report came out, we said to them, "We understand that you have given of your time and have done all these things for us. Sometimes it's hard to look at things and not realize that there are things that need to be changed. We're giving you these recommendations because there are things that we feel need to be changed. You don't have to change them, but your work would be better if you did."

Then the power struggle began. They said, "Who are you people to tell us that we've done this wrong?" Well, we didn't tell them they did everything wrong. We just gave them a few recommendations to make things better. We said, "Yes, things are going right, and they are

good. But here are a few suggestions that we'd like to give you because we are stakeholders in this. This is our community, and we would like to have a voice. We don't want to become a power. We just want to be able to say that we live here. What you do is going to change our lives and the lives of our children, and we want to have a say in that. That's the only power that we want to have."

The Empowerment Zone is supposed to be community participation. It's supposed to be reinventing government. Excuse me, but when you put the same people in there who have done it all these years, that is not reinventing government. When we were made an Empowerment Zone, it was to empower people. But if the same people sit on that board that have always sat on that board, how are you going to empower the people?

Fear on the Learning Team

Jorge Landivar (InterAmerican

Development Bank): I'm intrigued by the two people that thought that they would lose their jobs by being associated with the Learning Group. Is there polarization between the businesses and the Empowerment Zone? Why would people think that their jobs were at stake?

Brian Thomas: I don't think anyone fully understands the political relations of a small community like ours. I'm sure it could be the subject of many doctoral dissertations. Here's the way I envision how someone could end up losing their job because their name was on the Learning Team report. It's not that a person would say to themselves, "I'm an employer over this person, and they put their name on that report, and that report was negative about me, and I'm going to find a reason to fire them." It would be even more below ground than that. A person would say to themselves, "I want to get back at that person whose name was on the report that was negative about me. I'm not the person's employer myself, but a family member who owes me a favor is." It sounds unbelievable, but it certainly happens. It's wrong and it's all below the table and it's very, very complicated. I've had people say,

“Document that and get some legal action going.” It would be nearly impossible to document such mechanisms.

This manifests itself not so much in losing a job, as in not gaining one. You can look at people that obtained certain jobs and construct in your mind how they ended up getting those jobs. It has been a favor for this person, a favor for that person. Meanwhile, there may be a huge number of people that are clearly more qualified. Once again, it's nothing you can prove.

Finding Out What People Want in a Community Center

Marion Pratt: What process did you use to help communities prioritize their interests?

Joan Harrigan-Farrelly: Has there been a survey of young people within the school system to find out what they're looking for in a community center—and also within the broader community?

Cathy Howell: A survey about the community center was put out to the schools, but the schools also have their own agenda. It happened that some of the teachers put up on the bulletin board what they thought the community center should be like. Those surveys came back, and the fourth grade's surveys all were the same and the fifth grade's all were the same.

Brian Thomas: The Learning Team has discussed doing our own surveying of school systems and people out in the community. We would try to get as large a sample as possible and a large cross-section and to be careful not to survey people to death, because they have been surveyed a lot with the Empowerment Zone.

Joan Harrigan-Farrelly: I guess perhaps I should not have used the word survey. What I meant was doing town meetings with the kids themselves, having a free-flowing discussion with children as well as with the adults.

Cathy Howell: We have done that, and they have devised a wish list for the community center with about 900 items on it. We've condensed it to about 50 items. But that's not the wish list of the lady who's running that

project group. It's not her agenda. We kind of forced her into having three simultaneous public meetings so that people could speak out. But she's bucking us all the way. She's saying, “I'll do it when I'm ready.”

Brian Thomas: These meetings follow the town-meeting concept, because they're simultaneous and they're in radically different geographical areas of the county.

Relationship Between “Insiders” and “Outsiders”

Sher Plunkett: Would you say a little bit about the relationship between the insiders and the outsiders, the people from the community and the support from the University of Tennessee?

Vicky Creed: We worked really closely from the front end in terms of defining the roles that people would play. We made it very clear that the outcome we wanted would be the development of local capacity. We would know we were successful if we saw people who were able to function in other capacities in their communities outside the Learning Team, either in other jobs or on other committees. We wanted to change the way business is done at the local level.

We trained the regional researchers on the participatory method. The University of Tennessee pulled together training. The regional researchers were not to go in with their graduate students and do the work. They were to help facilitate the process. We worked with them on process skills so that they could go back, work with each Learning Team to revisit the original plan, list problems, and then come up with prioritizing activities. So the role of the researcher, once the Learning Team was in place, was facilitation. Earlier, during the collection of baseline information to choose the communities to pilot the Learning Initiative, the researchers acted like researchers. They went into all 33 of the rural communities and “baselined” them.

At the other end, we brought our researchers together for a three-day workshop. We asked them to bring in their own findings. We had them make an oral presentation of their

case study. It took a whole day. Others, as they heard a finding or a learning or a recommendation, put those on 5x7 index cards. Those cards were then literally spread out on the floor and grouped by theme. What did we see? What have we learned? Those of us at the University of Tennessee also contributed our own findings and learnings. Over the three days, we synthesized the researchers' findings and recommendations as they related to the Empowerment Zones, the Learning Team process, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the University of Tennessee.

We then went through the same process with the Learning Team coordinators and team members. We brought them all together for five days. The researchers, who also attended, presented their list of findings and learnings to the Learning Teams after the Learning Teams had come up with theirs. Then we synthesized those. It was messy.

The Participatory Approach Takes Time

Cathryn Thorup: One of the comments about a more participatory approach is that it is too time-consuming. I would imagine that the board probably felt they could get things done more quickly and more efficiently in the past when they weren't questioned.

Vicky Creed: Somebody asked how we deal with the criticism that this is taking a long time. We're getting criticized about that big-time. And we're asking for help. We're asking for some endorsement from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, from our patron. We want USDA to tell people at the local level that they are not just counting jobs. Citizen participation really is also countable. They don't seem to get that.

Coup d'Etat

Dennis Daniel: I work as a (USDA) desk officer with about 11 enterprise communities—Oklahoma, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, California, Washington, Ore-gon. Congratulations for what you're doing because it's clearly needed. My only question is: Have

you thought about a coup in terms of the board?

Cathy Howell: We have used that exact word, but we're divided. The newer generation of political people say, "Yes, a coup is exactly what we need." The people who have been in power forever are saying, "You don't understand the whole picture. This is the way we have always done it, and this is the way we're going to continue to do it." The twelve-member board is split six and six. Whether we stay a Learning Team is really up to them. I don't know whether we're going to be here next year or not. But we gave it our best shot. That's all we could do.

Brian Thomas: I guess we're trying to have a positive effect without maybe going to the extreme of a coup.

Vicky Creed: The ideal is collaboration.

Diane La Voy: When Vicky and I were talking about organizing this Forum, she drew out for me the very different situations that the various Learning Teams are engaged in. Some of them are apparently in quite a dramatic situation of sorting out relationships and conflicts with their boards; others having worked out very nice arrangements at present, but having perhaps had hard times in the past; others where perhaps one might even fret that the board and the Learning Team were a little bit too cozy, too friendly.

Not too many forums end on quite the "perils of Pauline" note that you've struck for us, so maybe that'll be a draw for having another session a year from now.

Communications from the E-Mail Bag

Structuring Participation to Avoid Chaos

Diane La Voy quoted from this e-mail in her welcoming remarks for this Participation Forum session. It was posted to GP-Net, the USAID-hosted electronic conversation group on participation, by **Richard Ford** of Clark University: “Unstructured participation is chaos—and we have enough of that already. Over the last ten years we have worked out a series of clear structured steps that may vary from setting to setting but that have in common the need to systematize the process of including larger numbers of constituencies than are normally considered part of the decision-making process. The steps include:

“*Data Collection.* There are many ways to include substantially more perspectives than are often included in the process of data collection. One must distinguish between ‘giving data,’ and collecting data. The latter would include a role in designing what needs to be collected, who will collect it, and how it will be collected.

“*Data Analysis.* Who will analyze the collected information, how will it be carried out, and in what form will it be presented? Many constituents may lack formal skills of literacy but still may be highly interested in considering causes of problems and previous responses to particular issues.

“*Ranking.* Setting priorities (goals) is the next step. Many approaches include ways for large numbers of people to set goals in an orderly and systematic format. These approaches do not necessarily include voting—in which the minority will always lose.

“*Planning Action.* Setting goals and ranking responses, taking into account the spatial, temporal, socio-economic-institutional, and technical information, can also be an open, participatory process. The main point here is to use the rankings as the basis upon which action is considered.

“The action plan also needs to consider what each constituency will contribute. If participation is simply to get the government or the donor or the private sector to pay for something, it is not participation. Rather it is political pressure. Participation implies that each constituency has both needs as well as something to contribute. That is where the concept of partnerships develops.

“*Indicators.* Finally, there is a need to find out what different constituencies consider to be the important indicators to monitor and how/who will monitor them. Experience suggests that if all constituents have access to the baseline data as well as to the progress/change in the indicators they have selected to measure, then the participation will not be a one-time fix. Instead, it will be a long-term and, ideally, a productive partnership.

“We have a publications list if that is of interest.”

*The following overview of popular participation in Bolivia was sent by **Walter Guevara** of USAID/La Paz. The overview was prepared for Brian Atwood's visit last year: “The groundbreaking 1994 Popular Participation Law is bringing about radical changes in Bolivia by:*

- **Mandating** that one-fifth of national tax revenues be distributed on a per capita basis to wholly new municipalities solely on the presentation of a yearly action plan and budget
- **Empowering** citizen oversight committees to channel community priorities towards municipal government and to ensure greater accountability of municipal officials
- **Establishing** accessible procedures for over 20,000 community organizations to become legally recognized actors in the eyes of the municipal and national government
- **Dividing** Bolivia into 310 new municipalities largely coincident with existing sections of provinces and reducing former regional planning mechanisms to a bare minimum
- **Extending** municipal jurisdictions to the countryside, thus entitling marginalized indigenous communities to become determining actors in municipal government

- **Broadening** the social base of democracy by turning municipalities into schools for effective citizenship, where ordinary citizens participate in decisions affecting them

One of the main challenges Bolivia must face to successfully implement the Popular Participation Law is to prevent gridlock. Municipal governance can sink in a Bermuda Triangle of lively watchdog committees, vibrant community organizations supported by a whole host of well-financed and well-meaning NGOs, and inexperienced municipal officials.

“The borderline between official authority and legitimate participation could start to blur. Certain local political traditions foster drowning with one’s adversaries if that’s the only way to block their path. Popular Participation could degenerate into the petty rule of local tyrants.

“To prevent the extremes of chaos and abuse of power, a new political culture must evolve, one in which consensus, compromise, coalition-building, respect for opponents, and a constructive opposition are valued. For a country characterized for most of its history by the manipulative politics of narrow self-interest, this undertaking has revolutionary implications.”

Apathy: The Opposite of Participation as Chaos

Andrea K. Freeman: “Like the GP-NET subscriber from Manila (whose e-mail contribution was read at yesterday’s session), my own thinking jumped to those who remain silent and how to elicit participation from them.

“I had the opportunity to do some work with a small Indian tribe in an isolated, rural corner of Montana. My project focused on the tribe’s potential use of a multi-million dollar award settlement with the U.S. government for economic development. The tribal representatives with whom I worked went all out to try to get input from the community as to how these funds should be allocated and used. Clearly, the more people involved in the process, the greater the legitimacy of the outcome. Also, there are some pretty good ideas floating around out there! The small group of tribal representatives went door-to-door and called district meetings to record public opinion. Despite these efforts, participation was minimal.

“It is necessary to look at the reactions for this inaction/disinterest: disillusionment with and alienation from the political process (even in a small community), institutional memory of past developmental failures on the reservation, isolation, etc. These are hardly easily fixable. Given the infamous historical relationships and legacies that Indian tribes have with the U.S. government, disinterest is hardly surprising—even when it is members of that same community who are trying to promote positive change. Then, throw in political (structure of the Tribal Council, the legal system, etc.), economic (extremely high unemployment, isolation), social (tensions between progressives and traditionalists, school drop-out rates, alcoholism, etc.), and cultural dynamics unique to that tribe (role of elders, etc.), and where do you start? (Or, a reason for the ‘silence’ could simply be lack of channels to disseminate information other than word of mouth—no Reservation publications or newspapers).

“In many cases, the root of these problems is structural. Forms of government and constitutions were imposed by the U.S. government or Indian tribes without particular regard to their social or cultural norms. As a result, the legitimacy of the entire political process as it exists is thrown into question.

“However, despite the low turnout for district meetings, much heed was given to the concerns expressed. The gatherings not only collected ideas for “development projects,” but also served as windows into the frustrations and sentiments of the community. And most importantly, these sessions opened the eyes of the community to the efforts of a small, yet well-intentioned, constituency that is openly looking for community input so that the development process will not be hijacked by a powerful few.